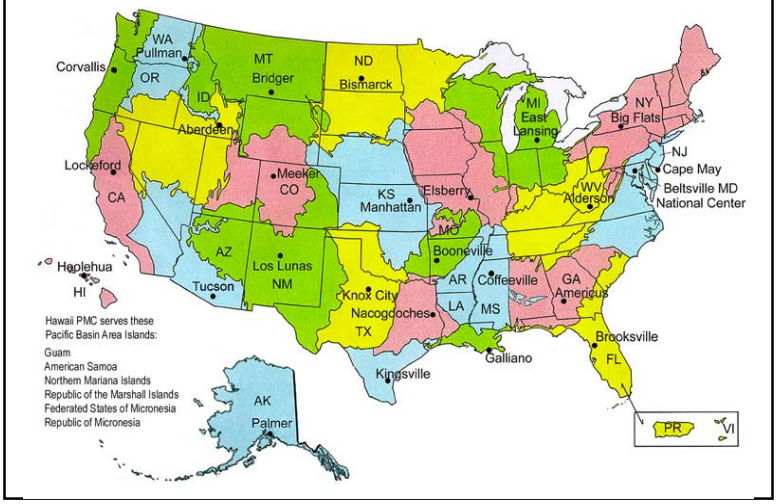
Plant Materials Program

The Plant Materials (PM) Program develops plants and plant science technologies for the successful conservation of our nation's natural resources. The Program consists of a network of Plant Materials Centers (PMC) and Plant Materials Specialists (PMS) strategically located throughout the United States. Together, PMCs and PMSs provide essential and effective vegetative solutions for critical habitats, environmental concerns, management practices, and key farm and ranch programs. There are 26 PMCs with service areas defined by ecological boundaries.

Locations and Service Areas of Plant Materials Centers



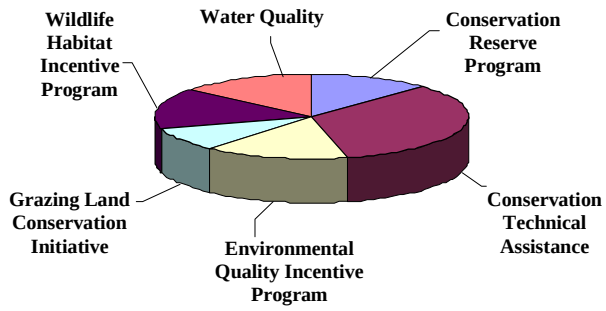
Program Activities

The primary function is to provide vital information to private landowners who need assistance in addressing critical land management problems like drought, land restoration after fires, and invasive species. In 2000 there were 92,250 fires covering 7.4 million acres, and in 1999 there were 70,722 fires covering 4.4 million acres. Problems with invasive species continue to grow with weed infestations increasing at the rate of 8 to 20% annually. An area **twice the size of Delaware** is lost to weeds each year. Invasive species greatly reduce agricultural production, and they often eliminate desirable plants completely. The economic impact of weeds on the U.S. economy is estimated at $137 billion annually. The outcry and the demand from all levels to do something continue to gain momentum. In 2000, the National Governors' Association passed a resolution indicating the urgency of dealing with the national problem of invasive species.

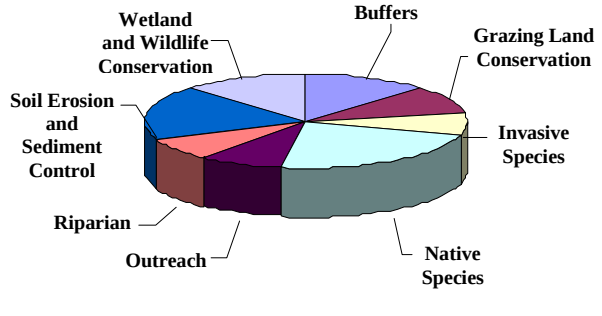
A field invaded by yellow starthistle.

Plant Materials work is an essential element of most NRCS programs. With about 550 active studies, the PM Program focuses on developing plant technology with immediate practical application. This work forms the backbone of NRCS Conservation Practice Specifications, and it is vital for the success of Farm Bill Conservation Programs, including CRP/CREP, WHIP, GLCI, EQIP, and WRP. Products from the PM Program include plant releases, printed materials, and oral presentations that address key resource concerns. The scope of Plant Materials work is illustrated by the diagram below along with the type of resource concern that the PM Program addresses.

Plant Materials Studies Addressing NRCS Programs



Technology Transfer Addressing Resource Concerns



Program Achievements

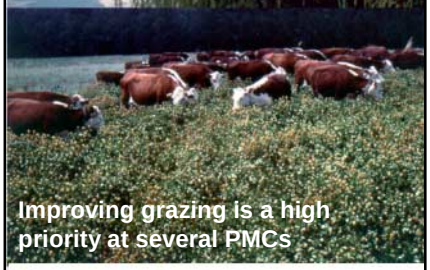
Technology from Plant Materials Centers and Specialists forms an integral part of the NRCS Strategic Plan and its performance plan goals. The goals of providing a productive natural resource base and a high quality environment can not be realized without sound plant science technology. Plant technology is essential in meeting objectives dealing with soil conservation, sustained productivity, healthy habitats, and water quality. Some sensitive areas where Plant Materials technology is vital to the nation are 1) coastal erosion stabilization from the Great Lakes to our oceans (including tidal salt marsh restoration); 2) culturally important plants for tribes; 3) grazing lands needs from east to west including public lands; 4) carbon sequestration and global climate change; 5) agricultural waste filtering and buffer strips; 6) native alternatives to non-native species; 7) restoration of wetland and wildlife habitat; and 8) fire restoration.

There are more than 500 releases from the PM Program, with over 400 being used commercially. Commercial production of these releases exceeded $120 million in Fiscal Year 2000. In addition to the economic value, PM releases are used in a wide variety of conservation practices throughout the United States and beyond our borders. Based on commercial sales of seed and plants during the year 2000, it is estimated that **enough seed was produced to plant 3.7 million acres, enough herbaceous plants were produced to plant 21,167 acres, and enough trees and shrubs were produced to plant a row that stretched for over 2,180 miles.** In all, the 2000 commercial production of our plant releases would cover an area **three times the size of Delaware.** PM releases are planted on a wide variety of sites, resulting in a tremendous amount of soil saved each year. Saved soil means more productive cropland, cleaner streams, and improved habitat for wildlife. The value of these is priceless.

Program Needs

A strong, viable Plant Materials Program is vital to our nation's natural resources. Based on a recent study, continued success of the Plant Materials Program is threatened by rising business costs that impact staff and operations. Additional funds are necessary now to maintain the effectiveness of the Program to address plant needs which are critical to solving conservation problems.

'Vermillion' smooth cordgrass stabilizes shorelines in the south



Improving grazing is a high priority at several PMCs

Vegetative buffers help filter nutrients from agricultural fields

Bismarck Germplasm violet prairie clover, a 2000 release by the Bismarck, North Dakota Plant Materials Center

The Aberdeen Plant Materials Center, Idaho.

For more information on the Plant Materials Program, visit our web site at:
http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov

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